



Michael FRIMPONG, Ph.D.

Michael is the Head, Industrial Engineering, Management Development and Productivity Institute (MDPI) 0243661973
michael.frimpong@mdpi.gov.gh / frimpgh@yahoo.com

Engaged workforce – a gain to productivity

Employees are organized in some way or form to achieve work objectives. The organization's aim is achieved only through the coordinated efforts of its human resources, and rightly so, effective management of human resources is the cornerstone of organizational effectiveness. It is no brainer to say that the quality of the human resources is a principal driver of productivity. Whilst the mantra 'satisfied employees' has popular acclaim among the business fraternity, an 'engaged workforce' is the ultimate productivity driver. The dominant view, however, is that satisfied workers are there to get, whilst engaged workers are there to give. Whilst workers endeavor to attain the desired productivity levels, management nonetheless should, as a matter of necessity, look to engage the workforce vigorously. Nothing is more demotivating than an ill-managed and disengaged workforce. If workers are not empowered through engagement via workplace cooperation, joint problem-solving, training, and other means, then it is up to managers alone to make improvements, maintain operations, and 'own' the results. Interestingly, a large number of business problems stem from the lack of involvement and disengagement of workers.

The character of workforce engagement

Effective workforce management and engagement are the primary drivers of all successful businesses and a key to productivity improvement. Employee engagement is about fostering a mutual commitment between the company and its employees. It is also about workers doing their job beyond what is required, thus making both the employee and the company successful. This leads to the use of discretionary effort (the effort beyond what is needed). This resonates with Kevin Kruse's (2017) assertion that 'employee engagement is the emotional commitment an employee has to the organization and its goals.' Engagement is about unlocking employee potential to drive high performance and about capturing people's heads and hearts. Employee engagement drives business results. Valuable data from a grey source indicates that highly engaged workers are 480% more committed to helping their companies succeed. Also, highly engaged workers are 250% more likely to recommend improvement. The

scary part is that employees with lower engagement are four times more likely to leave their jobs than those who are highly engaged. On the other hand, disengaged managers are three times more likely to have disengaged employees. It is said that bad managers, however, are creating active disengagement.

The number of disengaged or actively disengaged employees is believed to be at an alarming level of seven (7) out of ten (10). Imagine you, a member of a 10-man crew: as three (3) are working so hard, five (5) are looking at the scenery (standing aloof), and two (2) are trying to sink the boat. This is evidence of a phenomenon currently occurring in many companies where disengagement is high.

To address the challenges of disengagement, Organizations should adopt a paradigm of understanding and engage workers at all levels. Notably, areas of engagement should be at the-

- Physical level- reduce safety risks to the barest minimum. This gesture is indicative of securing their commitment to ensuring employee safety.
- Social and emotional level- build teamwork and positive relationships between colleagues (e.g., respect, trust), manage conflict effectively, and build motivation.
- Intellectual level- develop knowledge and skills of staff through training, encourage ideas and suggestions.
- Values, ambition, and vision - develop a shared vision for how the company will survive the crisis and recover after, as well as cultivate positive values about work.

Engagement through Workplace Cooperation

An attempt to improve productivity by engaging the workforce through Workplace Cooperation is feasible. In the broader International Labour Organisation (ILO) discussion on sustainable enterprises, it is said that "Sustainable enterprises need to innovate, adopt environmentally friendly technologies, develop skills and human resources, and enhance productivity to remain competitive in national and international markets. These enterprises also need to apply workplace practices based on full respect for fundamental rights at work and international labour standards, and foster good labour-management relations as important means of raising productivity and creating decent work." Workplace Cooperation, thus, is a process whereby workers and management resolve issues

at the workplace together through involvement and discussion for the mutual benefit of both parties. It is a mechanism enabling both parties to understand each other's needs, interests, and difficulties.

Consequently, workplace cooperation is based on three pillars: confidence built on a history of good communication and information sharing, trust, and mutual respect.

Effective communication remains a pivotal factor in employee engagement, as it facilitates an understanding of others' thoughts, feelings, opinions, and values, ultimately leading to productive outcomes. It is also a bridge in

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people's contact. Through this bridge, people can share their feelings and knowledge, clear the air, and promote understanding, thereby reaching a consensus or agreement. The power of communication is inextricably linked with successful business, as workers and management are aligned in the organization's vision through a common understanding and a seamless flow of interaction. Trust is built on relationships involving honesty, integrity, and justice. Trust exists when both parties believe the other has at least some concern for their interests and well-being. Trust is guaranteed when a company practices workplace cooperation, with no limitations placed on workers to communicate their grievances to management.

Respect, as the third component to achieving workplace cooperation, involves acknowledging efforts and taking the opinions of colleagues seriously. Respect in the workplace stems from a fundamental understanding that each person is unique and that no one should be disrespected or discriminated against for any reason, including differences in race, gender, or disability. To ensure adherence to respect, employees and management take responsibility. For example, workers should not abuse the atmosphere of open

communication and suggestion schemes to spew untruth and become overly familiar with leadership, all in the name of workplace cooperation. Respect demands a certain level of responsibility and conscientiousness from us.

Invariably, a necessary consequence for the practice of workplace cooperation and its concomitant effect on productivity is information sharing. Employees are engaged when they are empowered to share information through daily worker-supervisor meetings, a practical tool that provides a good opportunity for feedback and clarification. Through daily meetings, workers can be

uncertainties, upskilling is particularly welcome, as people need to be fast-tracked into higher responsibilities in case the unexpected happens. The idea of people building higher-level capacities to take on a more significant role is necessary, considering the current dispensation. Multi-skilling occurs when a worker is trained in multiple skills or jobs. When organisations adopt the practice of multi-skilling, the intent is to remove functional barriers and increase the flexibility of the workforce, aligning with the ideals of job enrichment and empowerment.

Training rubrics

The pedagogy of training remains a key determinant in impacting the knowledge and skills of employees in multi-tasking or up-skilling. It is worth noting that organisations should adopt standard operating procedures (SOPs) for training in employee capacity building efforts. A good training regime geared towards fulfilling the workforce engagement needs in the organisation should be supervisor-centred. This is because only properly trained supervisors can impact the right training. This training is built on the bedrock of job instruction, methods, and relations. A supervisor with relevant skills (instructing, improving processes, and managing people) and knowledge (of the subject matter and its associated responsibilities) delivers the training. Failure to effectively train the supervisor, who is mandated to instruct accordingly, will demoralize the workforce instead of truly engaging them. Organisations should be guided by a training plan that schedules all workers, identifies their areas of need, and specifies the delivery time.

It is essential to prioritize individual training by establishing clear standards to minimize fluctuations and enhance consistency in performance. Another key reminder in engaging workers through training is the job methods. Supervisors must be trained on how to break down tasks to improve performance. As you produce a job breakdown, engage workers in the preparation and verification process to ensure their input is considered and valued. Be sure to gather feedback and ideas, especially on how the method can be improved. Moreover, for training to thrive and have the desired impact on the workforce, one cannot overlook the importance of job relations in managing the

workforce and motivating them to give their best. Results are achieved through people, and as such, a good relationship with the workers fosters synergy, making it easier to meet the training results.

Engage with MDPI

Engaging the Management Development and Productivity Institute (MDPI), a government Organization well-versed in capacity building and consultancy, to implement a Training-of-Trainers (ToT) program aimed at improving training assimilation and knowledge absorption within organizations is a prudent decision. The initiative will focus on equipping selected staff with advanced facilitation, adult learning, and knowledge-transfer skills, enabling them to effectively cascade training internally. By combining evidence-based training methodologies, practical application, and continuous mentoring, institutional learning systems will be strengthened, staff performance will be enhanced, and the sustainability of capacity-building investments will be ensured.

Concluding Remarks

The best way to boost engagement and ensure thriving organisations is for leaders to build trust by caring about employees, having integrity, and demonstrating competence. There is also an overwhelming challenge for employers to remain highly engaged. Engaged employers focus on purpose and values, thereby encouraging empowerment and innovation. Such engagement on the part of employers fosters an unmatched commitment and team spirit, which cannot be achieved solely through policies and procedures. As Ben Simonton posited, 'turned on people figure out how to beat the competition. 'Turned off' people only complain about being beaten by the competition. Engaged employees are thus the 'turned on', committed, and ready to contribute meaningfully to the organisation's progress. In contrast, disengaged workers are 'turned off', bystanders, and those who detract from the organisation's progress. Well-meaning organisations should actively engage their workers through empowerment, capacity building, and workplace cooperation to achieve productive gains.